

**Mescal Park
Neighborhood Meeting Notes
August 25, 2005
Via Linda Senior Center**

Staff present: Judy Weiss, Parks and Recreation Director, Bill Murphy, Parks and Grounds Management Director, Reed Pryor, Parks and Grounds Management Manager, Leslie Clark, Parks and Recreation Manager, Rob Millar, Citizen & Neighborhood Resource Dept, Walt Brodzinski, Traffic Engineering, Karen Rumore, Recreation Coordinator, Melissa Lempke, Communication and Public Affairs, Gloria Bianco, Administrative Secretary.

Members of the Parks and Recreation Commission present: Chairman Donn Loper and Shelley Anderson.

Introductions: Rob Millar, Citizen and Neighborhood Resources Department made introductions with approximately 28 residents present at the meeting. He advised some ground rules and introduced Judy Weiss, Parks and Recreation Director, who recapped the process leading up to today's meeting.

There are 3 remaining issues: lighting, use of basin and parking. A petition was passed around the neighborhood. For those citizens that have not seen this petition copies were made and distributed. The petition suggested that neighbors would have no objection to the City allowing equestrian use of the grass basin. Further, that the equestrians would not continue to pursue the installation of lights in the equestrian arena.

A citizen asked how likely is it that a change in the ordinance would get approval from the City Council for riding in the basin. Upon further review of the ordinance it was found that an area could be administratively "designated" as an equestrian area. This would not be exclusive equestrian use, but would permit equestrian use of this particular neighborhood park – along with all other typical recreational use. In addition, it was discussed that after the Parks and Recreation Commission in July, Risk Management agreed to allow the basin to be designated for equestrian use. Risk prefers a pilot program of 12-24 months along with a list of rules that would reflect permitting the same type of use that is currently happening.

A citizen advised that she trots her horse, is this still permitted? Ms. Weiss advised that the user would need to follow current etiquette practices that seem to be occurring today, as well as the agreed upon rules. This is a multi use park. Another citizen made the comment that the basin is not conducive to galloping or polo playing; it is only good for cooling off horses and feels the neighbors with horses felt the same.

In regards to riding in the grass basin, one citizen said, back in 1987 there was a similar pilot program allowing riding in the basin. In November of 1988, former Parks Director, Bill Ensign came back to the citizens advising that Risk Management decided that this would pose a liability to the City and pulled riding in the basin. Our fear today is that this could happen again and not only do we lose the option of riding in the basin, we also lose the option of lights at the arena. This is what we don't want to happen. Ms. Weiss advised that the City has an obligation to protect the users of the park and the intent is to ensure that the rules are enforced.

It was mentioned that there was an isolated incident a few years ago of a couple that was playing polo in the grass basin. Ms. Weiss advised the City is prepared to deal with these situations and enforce the agreed upon rules. She reiterated that public facilities are not to be used for commercial purposes.

A citizen mentioned a potential solution to the parking problem. He suggested permits to park in certain areas. Walt Brodzinski, City Traffic Engineer, advised that we are talking about a public park surrounded by a public street. If you put a sign up that no parking is permitted here, all this does is spread the problem elsewhere and does not solve the problem. We also need to ask the question is the issue aesthetics or is there really a safety concern? If there is a safety concern, Mr. Brodzinski noted he would be happy to meet with affected neighbors and take a look at the situation and make a determination.

A number of citizens did feel there was a safety concern and there was discussion regarding putting a parking lot in the park. Parking at night is also a problem. Another neighbor pointed out that cars often blocked the bridle path as well as parking in front of a fire hydrant.

Mr. Brodzinski advised he could address potentially unsafe conditions as well as the condition of the dirt road. All want to make sure that citizens and neighbors can park safely. There was also agreement to keep the area rural.

Another question was, where are the soccer people coming from? Ms Weiss responded that the city is extremely limited in park resources so when a group finds a place to play they will practice and play there. There were some neighbors that advised that the soccer is coming from their own neighborhood and they have the right to use it.

The focus was brought back to the lights. The neighbors with horses who would like to see lights in the arena are willing to forego the lights if the wording on the petition reflected that if they lose the opportunity to ride in the basin, that the lights would be put back on the table for negotiation. These citizens do not want to relinquish the lights if they don't have the ability to legally ride in the grass basin. This point was made repeatedly by several neighbors.

Ms. Weiss reiterated the minimum standards for safe and uniform lighting of the arena. She reviewed lighting control technology and the ability to control the timing of the lights coming on and going off.

Turning off the lights anywhere between 7:30PM and 9:30PM was discussed. Some were ok with this time frame. Some neighbors noted that didn't care about the time since they bought in the area and no light poles were existing. Their view would be negatively impacted by the light poles. The aesthetic was very important and they also felt the value of the property next to the park would be affected negatively.

A neighbor mentioned to the group that improvements to the park are imminent and these improvements cannot be dictated by only the neighbors that live adjacent to the park. The rest of the neighborhood also has a say as to the wants and needs of the park. The neighbors have good intentions to keep the park as close to the master plan as possible however, feel any changes proposed for the park will be decided by a few vs. the voice of many.

Ms. Weiss said this issue will return to the Parks and Recreation Commission in the October-November timeframe. If the Commission hears from the group either by signatures on the petition, letters or emails saying that you agree to riding in the basin and forego the lights for now, the changes discussed could be made, and administered right away. If however, some still feel that lights are desirable, that is your right and this issue would continue through the planning commission and finally the City Council.

A citizen asked if there is any way that they could get this in writing, saying that riding in the basin could not be revoked without a catastrophic reason. Ms. Weiss advised that staff would monitor the use and take appropriate action. Commissioner Shelley Anderson reiterated if the viewpoint of the neighbors is consistent then the Commission would make these recommendations.

The other issue is the budget. All improvements to the arena have been made without using the CIP money allotted for park improvements. If these funds are not used, after a period of time, the money may no longer be available. This means if neighbors decide later that lights need to be addressed again, there would need to be another public process and new budget appropriated.

One person mentioned that she thought it would be a good idea to include a fence on the basin side of the bridle path to protect the people using the park from the horse.

The meeting ended with no consensus but with an understanding that most in the group simply want to ride in the basin. There is also a petition by the neighbors that is to be circulated with agreed upon wording. If this occurred then they would be willing to sign. The neighbors decided to meet on their own to further discuss this compromise.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40pm.